

USIS Washington File

*EPF404 08/20/98

TEXT: U.S. GOVERNMENT FACT SHEET ON USAMA BIN LADIN
(Saudi advocates destruction of United States) (860)

(The following U.S. government fact sheet was distributed by the Defense Department August 20, 1998.)

Usama Bin Ladin was born around 1955 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. He is the youngest son of Muhammad Bin Ladin, a wealthy Saudi of Yemeni origin and founder of the Bin Ladin Group, a construction firm heavily involved with Saudi Government contracts. Usama Bin Ladin left Saudi Arabia to fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1979. In the mid-1980s he co-founded the Maktab al-Khidamat (MAK) or Services Office, to help funnel fighters and money to the Afghan resistance in Peshawar with a Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood member named 'Abdallah 'Azzam. The MAK ultimately established recruitment centers around the world -- including in the U.S., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan -- that enlisted, sheltered, and transported thousands of individuals from over 50 countries to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. It also organized and funded paramilitary training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bin Ladin imported heavy equipment to cut roads and tunnels and to build hospitals and storage depots in Afghanistan.

Bin Ladin split from 'Azzam in the late 1980s to extend his campaign to all corners of the globe: 'Azzam remained focused only on support to Muslims waging military campaigns. Bin Ladin formed a new organization in 1988 called al-Qa'ida -- the military "base." After 'Azzam was killed by a car bomb in late 1989, the MAK split, with the extremist faction joining Bin Ladin's organization.

Bin Ladin returned to work in his family's Jeddah-based construction business after the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, but he continued his organization to support opposition movements in Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

Bin Ladin's anti-government activities prompted the Saudi government to expel him in 1991, after which he relocated to Sudan. Although the Afghan war had ended, al-Qa'ida has remained a formidable organization consisting of mujahedin of many nationalities who had previously fought with Bin Ladin. Many of these have remained loyal to and continue working with him today.

In May 1996, Sudan expelled Bin Ladin, largely in response to U.S. insistence and to the threat of UN sanctions following Sudan's alleged complicity in the attempted assassination of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia in 1995. Within a month, Bin Ladin took refuge in Afghanistan, where his support for and participation in Islamic extremist activities continued.

Bin Ladin's Organization

Al-Qa'ida's goal, in Bin Ladin's words, is to "unite all Muslims and to establish a government which follows the rule of the Caliphs." Bin Ladin has stated that the only way to establish the Caliphate is by force. Al-Qa'ida's goal, therefore, is to overthrow nearly all Muslim governments, which Bin Ladin views as "corrupt," to drive Western influence from those countries, and eventually to abolish state boundaries.

Al-Qa'ida is multi-national, with members from numerous countries and with a worldwide presence. Senior leaders in the organization are also senior leaders in other terrorist organizations, including those designated by the Department of State as foreign terrorist organizations, such as the Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya and the Egyptian al-Jihad. Al-Qa'ida seeks a global radicalization of existing Islamic groups and the creation of radical Islamic groups where none exist.

Al-Qa'ida supports Muslim fighters in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Tajikistan, Somalia, Yemen, and now Kosovo. It

also trains members of terrorist organizations from such diverse countries as the Philippines, Algeria, and Eritrea.

Anti-U.S. Agenda

Bin Ladin advocates the destruction of the United States, which he sees as the chief obstacle to reform in Muslim societies. Since 1996, his anti-U.S. rhetoric has escalated to the point of calling for worldwide attacks on Americans and our allies, including civilians.

-- Bin Ladin publicly issued his "Declaration of War" against the United States in August 1996.

-- When anti-U.S. attacks did not materialize immediately, he explained the delay: "If we wanted to carry out small operations, it would have been easy to do so immediately after the statements. Even the nature of the battle requires good preparation."

-- In November 1996 he pronounced as "praiseworthy terrorism" the bombings in Riyadh and at Khobar in Saudi Arabia, promising that other attacks would follow. He admitted carrying out attacks on U.S. military personnel in Somalia and Yemen, declaring that "we used to hunt them down in Mogadishu."

-- He stated in an interview broadcast in February 1997 that "if someone can kill an American soldier, it is better than wasting time on other matters."

-- In February 1998, Bin Ladin announced the creation of a new alliance of terrorist organizations, the "International Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and Crusaders." The Front included the Egyptian al-Gama'at al-Islamiyya, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Harakat ul-Ansar, and two other groups. The Front declared its intention to attack Americans and our allies, including civilians, anywhere in the world.

-- In May 1998, he stated at a press conference in Afghanistan that we would see the results of his threats "in a few weeks."

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